

BWC Strategy Session

Making the Most of Your Best Workplaces for Commuters Designation

On May 17, 2006, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM held a strategy session to provide participants with ideas and strategies for continuing the success of existing commuter benefit programs and increasing participation. Patrice Thornton, a Best Workplaces for Commuters team member, facilitated the conversation and introduced the featured speakers: Marci McGuire, Program Manager, Bishop Ranch Business Park, Barbara Disser, Parking/Commuter Management Coordinator, Boeing-Mesa, and Robin Snyder, a Best Workplaces for Commuters team member, EPA.

Patrice Thornton

Ms. Thornton opened the discussion by providing background on the strategy session and the group of participants. She explained that the session was unique because it involved both BWC Network members and Best Workplaces for Commuters employers. A number of Network members had expressed interest in integrating Best Workplaces for Commuters into local programs and maintaining employer interest. Many Network members have been promoting the Best Workplaces for Commuters list for several years and want to continue the excitement around their commuter benefit programs. Several employers also expressed a desire to keep management and employees engaged in their commuter benefit programs and to increase participation.

Barbara Disser

Ms. Disser shared her experiences as a Best Workplaces for Commuters employer. She explained that Boeing-Mesa had qualified as one of the Best

Workplaces for Commuters in 2004, and it was Boeing-Mesa's Best Workplaces for Commuters designation that prompted Boeing's management to approve transit and vanpool subsidies for employees.

In 2004, Ms. Disser explained the National Standard of Excellence to her director of site services and explained that Boeing-Mesa qualified for all of the criteria except for offering a transit or vanpool subsidy. The director requested a cost estimate for the subsidies. When Boeing-Mesa's management agreed to pay the full cost for bus passes and \$30 per month for vanpool subsidies, they immediately applied to become one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters. Ms. Disser worked with the City of Mesa to preserve the closest bus route to the Mesa facility and encouraged employees to use this and other commuter resources. At the time of the strategy session, the number of bus riders from Boeing-Mesa had increased from 20 to 75 and the number of vanpools had increased from one to eight.

Ms. Disser described her various strategies for using the Best Workplaces for Commuters logo to encourage employees to use commuter benefits. She uses the logo on fliers for special events, posters, and the Boeing Web site. Ms. Disser has used the Best Workplaces for Commuters banner for Bike to Work Day and Best Workplaces for Commuters magnetic signs for vanpools; although company policy prohibits her from using the Best Workplaces for Commuters window cling at Boeing, she said, they are a great tool for publicizing an organization's designation as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters. Every month Ms. Disser gives a 15-minute presentation to new employees about



Boeing's rideshare and commuter benefit program. Ms. Disser closed her segment of the presentation by explaining that she appreciates her employees' compliments on the success of their program, but her goal is for her employees to say that they work for the Best Workplace for Commuters.

Ms. Thorton noted that Boeing seems to understand the value of the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation, and that it seems as if they have made substantial improvements since achieving the designation.

Marci McGuire

Ms. McGuire provided a general overview of Bishop Ranch's commuter benefit program and her strategies for maintaining enthusiasm around its Best Workplaces for Commuters designation. Bishop Ranch is a charter member of Best Workplaces for Commuters and was involved with the EPA commuter benefit program prior to Best Workplaces for Commuters.

Bishop Ranch Business Park encompasses:

- 585 acres
- nearly 30,000 employees
- 23 years of service to commuters
- 700 fully subsidized bus passes for 4,000 bus riders, at a value of \$2 million

Ms. McGuire tries to improve Bishop Ranch's commuter benefit program every year; she has continually found new ways to use the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation. Bishop Ranch has a visual standard policy that prohibits the use of clings, posters, and banners in public areas, providing a challenge to promoting the designation. However, Ms. McGuire recounted that the Best

Workplaces for Commuters team provided her with a black and white Best Workplaces for Commuters logo, which she applies to many of her marketing materials. She also uses the logo in ads, brochures, an online electronic park-wide survey, paper surveys, stickers for commuter events, lapel pins, PowerPoint presentations, and the Bishop Ranch Web site. Ms. McGuire explained that she tries to place full color Best Workplaces for Commuters stickers on as many media as possible, including envelopes, timetables, display boards in bus shelters, and bus maps.

Ms. McGuire explained that it is important to mention Best Workplaces for Commuters as much as possible to make it part of employees' daily thought process. Ms. McGuire suggested that other BWC Network members could use her strategy and mention Best Workplaces for Commuters in newspaper, radio, and trade journal interviews. She told participants that if they have earned the designation, they should use it. She also pointed out that articulating the benefits in an interview can be challenging. She provided her ideas on the internal and external benefits of the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation.

External benefits include:

- Best Workplaces for Commuters employers are identified as offering quality programs with high standards, because only one percent of employers across the country have obtained the designation.
- The Best Workplaces for Commuters team is developing a brand that will provide instant recognition for peer organizations, funding organizations, competitors, and future employees.



Internal benefits include:

- Increasing employee pride.
- Increasing participation in commuter benefit programs.
- Attracting new tenants to business districts.

Ms. McGuire explained that her long-term vision is to integrate Best Workplaces to Commuters into the daily work culture. She explained that this will be a long process. However, if all Best Workplaces for Commuters employers and Network members do their part, it will quicken the process. She explained that both groups are already leaders in the commuter benefits world.

Robin Snyder

Ms. Snyder presented the logo use kit available on the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site, at www.bwc.gov/support/logo-use-kit.htm. The kit provides tools for using the logo, including fact sheets for specific target audiences and real-life examples of logo use on Web sites and in job advertisements. Ms. Snyder asked participants to e-mail her with questions about the logo use kit at snyder.robins@epa.gov.

Open Discussion

A participant asked about Bishop Ranch's bike services. Ms. McGuire explained that Bishop Ranch provides showers with lockers, bike racks, bike locks, and bike starter kits. The bike starter kit includes a waterproof bike pouch, a bike to work t-shirt with the Bishop Ranch and Best Workplaces for Commuters logo, a safety guide, and maps.

Ms. Carey Anderson brought up her company, Cambridge Systematics, Inc., which had also been involved with the EPA commuter benefits program

before Best Workplaces for Commuters. In her experience, it is easier to convince an organization as a whole to take advantage of commuter benefits immediately following its designation, but it is harder to convince new employees. Ms. Anderson asked Ms. McGuire for suggestions on encouraging new hires to use alternative forms of transportation; Ms. McGuire explained that she works with many employees one-on-one. She suggested anticipating all possible objections that employees might have to using commuter benefits and providing positive alternatives. Ms. Thornton suggested emphasizing rising gas prices. She also mentioned that one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters universities provides testimonials from transit, vanpool, and carpool users on its Web site.

Ms. Kathy Hughes from Devon Energy explained that Devon offers its employees a bus subsidy, full parking reimbursement for carpools, and vanpool incentives. She asked how to encourage employees to take advantage of the carpools and vanpools in addition to the bus passes. Ms. Jill Grant from Goodrich Aviation Technical Services, Inc., suggested providing a subsidy: Goodrich's vanpool subsidy has been a great incentive because of the long commutes her fellow employees must endure. Goodrich does not offer any subsidy for carpools, but does hold an annual drawing for a \$55 gift card that is given to four carpool riders. She expressed hope that Goodrich would increase its incentives this year.

Ms. Nancy Yarberry from EPA Region 6, in Dallas, Texas, shared IRS regulations that explain the tax benefits for commuter benefits for both employers and employees. Cornell Law School's Web site (see www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode26/usc_sec_26_00000132----000-.html) explains counting commuter benefits as non-taxable



income. This information is also on the IRS Web site. Ms. Yarberry explained that employers receive tax benefits for providing commuter benefits to employees and employees can pay for their own commuter benefits with pre-tax dollars. Ms. Carol Washington from Mary Kay, Inc., requested more information on this topic. She explained that Mary Kay has 100 percent participation in its commuter benefit program at one site and she would like all of the Mary Kay sites to become Best Workplaces for Commuters.

A participant from Texas Medical Center in Houston expressed interest in participating in future strategy sessions. Ms. Thornton asked that participants send potential topics for future strategy sessions to <bwc@epa.gov>.

Ms. Thornton encouraged the participants to visit the Best Workplaces for Commuters Web site, located at <www.bwc.gov>, and explore the resources and links available.

Closing

Ms. Thornton closed the discussion by thanking the participants and expressing her satisfaction with the call. She reminded the participants that the strategy session “Marketing to FORTUNE 500 Companies” will be held on Wednesday, May 24, 2006, at 2:30 PM EST.

